

Pioneers exemplify faith, courage

Learning about ancestors helps families today

■ July 24 marks the 148th anniversary of the arrival of the pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley. The day is commemorated in many areas of the Church with parades, celebrations and sunrise services. Below descendants of seven pioneers reflect on how learning about their heritage has influenced their lives.

BY SARAH JANE CANNON
Church News staff writer

*I've always known your names
But,
You were flat people on a white page
Until
I read your stories.
Now you are more than names
And
I know that your blood flows also in
My veins.*

Mary A. Johnson never knew her great-grandmother who, while suffering from bone disease, pushed her way across the plains with other Utah pioneers.

But after struggling with the same type of bone disease as a child, Sister Johnson says she feels a connection to her pioneer ancestor and draws courage



Courtesy LDS Church

Minerva K. Teichert's painting, "Pioneers Entering the Valley," portrays the Saints as they completed their westward journey to Utah in covered wagons.

explaining that people need to understand pioneer ancestors a "gift of love." are still living, and are proud to pro-

from her. In fact, she said learning about the people behind the names on her family tree has helped her overcome many of life's struggles.

"I feel like I kind of know these people, even though I don't know everything about them," said Sister Johnson of the Farmington 6th Ward, Farmington Utah North Stake. "I always feel good about talking about the things they did because of their dedication to what they thought was right."

In awe of the pioneers' endurance, faith and courage, Sister Johnson wrote a poem about her ancestors, in which an excerpt is printed above. She hopes the poem will perpetuate pioneer qualities in herself and others.

Florence C. Youngberg, director of the Sons of Utah Pioneers' library, said she also has dealt with many of life's trials by studying her ancestors.

"I lost four children," she explained. "I hope it will never happen to (my children) but it should not destroy their lives or their faith in God."

"You learn how important it is to be close to your husband and the Church and God. I don't care what it is, you can get through anything if you really rely on these things. I believe it because I have proved it."

The pioneers also proved it. "They lost so many," she whispered.

Sister Youngberg said her great-grandfather sat down and cried when he reached the Salt Lake Valley. His feet were bleeding because the soles had worn off his shoes. Two months later he and his wife lost their first child. They survived storms, hardships, sickness and death. But, Sister Youngberg remarked, they did not lose faith in God.

"Their lives are beautiful," she said,

stand the pioneers' sacrifice. "I came from these strong people. We all did."

Mary B. Harris of the Mountain View 2nd Ward, Salt Lake Hillside Stake, noted she is sometimes reminded of the pioneers' sacrifice by looking at a single boot.

"When I was reading about my great-grandfather, who lived close to Nauvoo, I found the family only had one pair of

"I have learned that most anything you really want to accomplish in life is really up to you. . . . That was their theme — never give up, never say die."

boots," she recalled. "When the boys were sent out to get wood or to do chores then they got the boots. I think, 'Oh boy, only one pair of boots for a whole family.'"

And the boots were too big for several of the children, she added. "When the smaller boys wore them they were really hard on them." But when they didn't wear them, she continued, they went barefoot.

"It has made me realize when I have problems I should really try to be as brave as they were," she commented.

Kenneth P. Rasmussen of the Parkway 6th Ward, South Jordan Utah Parkway Stake, called the legacy left by his

ancestors were famous or accomplished anything different from any other pioneers. But he takes pride in them because "they were good people" with honesty and integrity.

"They are just as great as if they had been the governor or anyone else," he said. "It took that kind of people to settle the West."

Lois Curtis' grandfather was born just outside of Winter Quarters, Neb., in a covered wagon. After resting "a couple of days" his family continued on their journey to Utah.

Two of his daughters, Cora H. Farmer Epperson, 89, of Salt Lake City, and Emma E. Farmer Davis, 95, of Logan,

claim their pioneer heritage.

"I remember (my grandfather) holding me on his lap and giving me advice about how beautiful life can be," remarked Sister Curtis of the Mt. Olympus 9th Ward, Salt Lake Mt. Olympus Stake. "I look over the Salt Lake Valley and I just cry. I look and I say they carved this valley out with their bare hands. They even carved it out of the desert which was supposed to be hopeless."

"Everyone of my grandparents did cross the plains. Nobody came here by car or train or airplane. They were willing to sacrifice everything they had."

Alfred S. Cordon, South Cottonwood 10th Ward, Salt Lake South Cottonwood Stake, said the sacrifice of early Church members was a sign of their great faith. One of his relatives left his wife and two small children in Nauvoo to serve a Church mission in Vermont.

Before he left he "knelt down and asked the Lord to protect his wife and children and just left them in the Lord's hands. He knew that the Lord would watch them," Brother Cordon commented.

Louise C. Green, president of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, said learning of her ancestors' lives has helped her when she has been down.

"I think of my grandmother when she lost her baby and when she lost her husband. They didn't have doctors," Sister Green explained.

"Our children need to know the hardship their ancestors went through to keep the religion that they so wanted," she said. "They had to give up everything for that."